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HARLEY- DAVIDSON LIVEWIRE 2020

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Éditions
Jean Robert

VOL. 49 NO. 07 2019
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FEATURES

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HARLEY-DAVIDSON LIVEWIRE

Is it ironic that Harley appears to be near the head of the pack in making high-performance electric motorcycles? Let's just say that here at Cycle Canada, we don't do irony—we just carry on, never changing.

34 PRESS LAUNCH
2020 SUZUKI KATANA

It's a sword you could cut sushi with. And a motorcycle that harks back to the wonder years but performs like tomorrow is already here.

46 PRESS LAUNCH
TRIUMPH STREET TRIPLE 2020

Take a hi-perf sport bike, make it comfortable, and give it to Paul Penzo. We're lucky he came back, and so are you. Triumph continues to amaze and impress.

ON THE COVER: *Jean Paré escorts Harley's new electric motorcycle down a Portland, Oregon, boulevard. Quieter than a leaf blower, and a whole lot faster!*

20



46



REGULARS

- 8 THE OUTSIDER
- 12 SPECULATOR
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While walking home from an appointment a few blocks away this morning, I encountered a wave of noise that had rolled at least a hundred metres down the road before ramming into my ears. I knew what it was, but kept walking, despite the danger that I would pick up a brick and throw it in the direction of an offender. A couple of minutes later, I walked into the max-decibel zone emitted by leaf blowers. Not one or two, but six of the damned things, three on each side of the street, moving leaves around in front of apartment buildings.

I hear them now, in fact; they might be different people with different blowers, but as I sit at my desk several hours later I hear the drone of two-stroke engines, and they're not dirt bikes.

There is some dispute regarding the toxicity of noise and exhaust emissions from leaf blowers, and there have been voices raised (over 75 decibels, so they can be heard) in favour of outright bans. Not likely; there are a couple of million of them in Canada. There is a good argument that their two-stroke power sources emit carcinogenic fumes, but lumping leaf blowers in with vaping instruments for a public-safety ban is unlikely.

Early this year the CBC ran a news story on its website about the issue of excessive noise in Toronto. The story said at least one local university professor claims that exposure to high noise levels can be physically harmful to more than the ears, and that vehicle noise is worse than other kinds. However, a survey conducted a year earlier found that construction noise, at least in Toronto, is more bothersome to residents than vehicle noise. Third on the list of noise irritants in that survey's findings, below condo and then house construction, is motorcycle noise, pulling in 21 percent of responses, right behind large-building and house construction at 34 and 26 percent. Car noise, in sixth place, caught 18 percent of responses. Leaf blowers and lawn mowers were down in eighth, 13 percent, just below the horror of barking dogs.

Lots of noise complaints and lots of noise sources to contend with, but in posted comments below the story, the very first one mentioned a "guy who hammers his motorcycle engine" at 6 a.m. The writer called him (or, I guess, her) "a public menace."





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We've all heard straight-pipe Harleys and their godawful racket that, most of us seem to assume, suggests attempted compensation for a weakened sense of masculinity and is rationalized as a life-saving measure. That issue has been done to death. What I see more and more of lately is 300 cc single-cylinder Japanese bikes with either after-market mufflers or none at all. These guys (yeah, pretty sure it's not gals) ride through Toronto with their beginner motorcycles bleating in a way that, one might surmise, is supposed to make a 300 seem more like a grown-up rider's 600. It would be infuriating if it weren't so laughably silly.

There are a lot of people who would love to see leaf blowers banned, all for a quieter neighbourhood—and not just in Toronto, I'm sure. I'd sign the petition. But if motorcycle noise is considered in Canada's biggest city to be the third-greatest source of irritating noise, and is the topic of the first comment to follow that CBC story, we might be smart to pay some attention to that. And if your 300 cc motorcycle makes more noise at 50 metres than a regular two-stroke leaf blower, or more than a stock CBR600, well, there might come a petition about you, too. I think 300 cc motorcycles are great for several reasons, but I'd sign that petition.

Oops! Maybe it was the intolerable (for me) racket of leaf blowers or the thought of signing a petition against Cycle Canada's faithful, but somehow I have just managed to write an Outsider column that was only two-thirds of its needed size—or was one third too long, since the Web allows us to decide at the last minute whether any item in this magazine will be one page, or two, or more, or not at all. The switch to digital has caught all of us a little unprepared, and there have been some complaints about the format of CC. But the flexibility of digital presentation—we ran a First Person story last issue without the author's name; we then went back in time, digitally, and the error was made to have never happened—that flexibility allows us to reconsider things on the fly, so you may see improvements in the structure of this paperless magazine. Hell, we got rid of Booth, didn't we?

Just kidding. I miss David already, as many of you do, I'm sure. David and Michael have both exited, to my sorrow, and it's not because we've gone digital. But we carry on. Cycle Canada has seen many changes over the past few decades, and now, as it approaches middle-age-crazy, here we are, reading a magazine on our phones (or trying to), getting the magazine delivered by e-mail, and wondering who in the hell still works here. I find myself gob-smacked at the notion that a person who was, 20 years ago, utterly thrilled to find his writing in this magazine is now, for all intents and purposes, if not officially, editing it. WTF?!

For the CBC story, **click here.** 

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KTM SHOWS OFF AT EICMA

Super Duke R, 890 Duke R, 390 Adventure revealed

By Steve Thornton

KTM revealed several new models at the EICMA motorcycle show in Milan early in November: the 1290 Super Duke R, the 390 Adventure, and the 890 Duke R. The 890 is expected to decorate Canadian showrooms in the fall and the other two should be here sooner in 2020.

The Austrian company showed a range of bikes at EICMA, including the 450 Rally, the 450 SX-F, and the RC16, a MotoGP bike.

The Super Duke R, says KTM, “has been ‘re-Beasted’” with a “radical re-invention” that includes a new frame, new styling, and new electronics. Weight is down, power is up.

The 390 Adventure has “harnessed the attributes and DNA from the incredibly capable and highly versatile” 790 Adventure, “as well as the R&D information gathered from nearly two decades of Dakar Rally” competition. KTM says the bike is an “ideal entry model” for riders who want to get into adventure riding, and is capable of light touring and off-road use. “Using elements of the KTM 390 Duke as a base and taking performance cues found at the heart of the KTM 450 Rally,” the bike blends good off- and on-road performance characteristics, says KTM.



KTM 390 Adventure




KTM 1290 Super Duke R

The KTM 790 Adventure Rally will also come to Canada in 2020. It'll be made in limited numbers, 500 worldwide, and will be hard to get—what KTM calls “extremely limited numbers.” The third and newest element of the 790 Adventure group, it's the “most travel capable rally bike,” the company says. “For those riders who demand the most hardcore performance and the very best suspension equipment available, this is the machine that will easily cross continents in order to ride to the start line of a rally,” KTM boasts.

Based on the KTM 790 Adventure R, the Rally model uses the same steel trellis chassis, the LC8c parallel twin engine, and “class-leading” electronic rider aids. The major difference, KTM says, is “the addition of the special WP XPLOR PRO suspension. Developed in the same department as WP's Factory Racing equipment, it offers superior performance for extreme riding. An additional 30 mm of suspension travel front and back helps clear the most awkward obstacles and brings the seat height to 35.8 in (910 mm).”

For 2020, the 790 Duke is sharper, says KTM, “boasting the 799 cc LC8c parallel twin motor nestled into one of the lightest and most compact chassis around.” The RC 390 also gets “updated looks” for 2020.

In 2019 KTM enjoyed considerable success in off-road racing, including an 18th Dakar success with the Red Bull KTM Factory team and a world championship in FIM Cross Country Rallies, an AMA championship in Supercross, a pro championship in off-road WORCS, and championships in GNCC and enduro racing.

The Austrian company also opened a new “Motohall” in Mattighofen over the summer. “The work, innovation and history of the brand is now fabulously displayed in a visual and interactive manner” at the Motohall. 

TEAM BLU

Yamaha Canada hands out awards for young amateur racers

By Steve Thornton




Ben LeClair wins a number 1 plate and a Yamaha Factory Ride Award in CSBK Amateur Lightweight Sport Bike.

A 17-year-old road racer from Blackstock, Ontario, rode a Yamaha R3 to a championship in Canadian Superbike's Amateur Lightweight Sport Bike division this year. Ben LeClair won Yamaha Canada's bLU cRU Factory Ride Award and will get a Yamaha motorcycle to race next year, \$2,500 towards Yamaha parts and accessories, and a custom graphics kit.

It might be no surprise to racing fans that LeClair won. His older brother Jake won the Yamaha prize last year and moves up to the Pro Sport Bike class in 2020.

Yamaha Canada gives factory awards to young amateur racers in motocross and flat track as well as road racing who collect the most points among Yamaha-equipped racers in their disciplines.

In motocross, 15-year-old Julian Benek of Mission, British Columbia, 17-year-old Jamie Powell of Carleton Place, Ont., and 16-year-old Jeremy McKie of Beloeil, Quebec, won bLU cRU factory ride awards, and in flat track 14-year-old Mavrick Cyr of Quebec City, Que., won the prize. 



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DUCATI WINS BEAUTY CONTEST

New Streetfighter is “super-naked”

By Steve Thornton


A Ducati was voted best-looking bike at the 2019 EICMA motorcycle show in Milan for the 10th time. The Streetfighter V4 collected 36.7 percent of votes in the competition, which has been run by Italian motorcycle magazine Motociclismo for 15 years. More than 14,500 votes were cast and the Ducati took the lead by more than double the votes for the second place bike, an Aprilia.

The result was announced on Nov. 10, the last day of the motorcycle show, and an award was presented to Ducati Design Center director Andrea Ferraresi by Motociclismo's editor in chief, Federico Aliverti, at a ceremony with EICMA's executive director Giacomo Casartelli.



Ducati calls the Streetfighter V4 a “super-naked” and says its Desmosedici Stradale 1103 cc engine packs a 208 horsepower wallop. It's light, at 178 kilograms, and meets the rider companionably with a high and wide handlebar that improves comfort.

Ducati has renewed the Panigale V2 for 2020, and has introduced five new versions of its motorcycles: the Multistrada 1260 S Grand Tour, the Diavel 1260 in what they call “dark stealth” colours and 1260 S in Ducati red, the Monster 1200 and finally the Scrambler Icon Dark. Two concept bikes were shown, a Scrambler DesertX and a Scrambler Motard, and three new electric bikes were presented at the show.

The second most popular model in the EICMA beauty contest was the Aprilia RS 660, which pulled 14.9 percent of votes. Third was MV Agusta's Superveloce 800, fourth was the Honda CBR1000RR-R, and in fifth was Moto Guzzi's V85 TT Travel. Votes were cast in person and on-line. Sharp-eyed readers may notice that only one motorcycle in the top five was not of Italian origin. 

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AYE MATEY!

Honda's new RR-R breaks the mould

By Steve Thornton



It's "Talk Like a Pirate" day at Honda—all year long. Year 2021, that is.

The 2021 CBR1000RR-R Fireblade SP is not only a year ahead of itself, it's a brand-new model and it took fourth place in an Italian beauty contest, losing out to three Italian motorcycles and trailed by another Italian motorcycle. Oh! What's a sexy Asian gal to do in the company of all these muscular Mediterraneos!

What she can do, of course. And that's quite a bit, according to Honda Canada. The RR-R is "built with an unwavering focus on circuit riding, with unprecedented levels of performance and control," according to a Honda Canada press release. The new Fireblade, Honda asserts, is an indication of Honda's future in sports and racing motorcycles. It's built "with heavy involvement from Honda Racing Corporation, to carry the legend forward."


The engine takes its cues from the RC213V-S (what Honda calls a "street-legal MotoGP machine"). The four-cylinder engine is compact, with a short stroke (same bore and stroke as the RC213V-S—81 by 48.5 mm), has a 13:1 compression ratio, and features "a semi-cam

gear train, finger-follower rocker arms, titanium connecting rods, RC213V-S internal friction reduction technologies, piston jets with check ball system and a built-in bottom bypass passage for the cylinder water jacket.” If you know what all that means, you’re ahead of us, though the connecting rods sound familiar.

There’s a ram-air duct in the fairing, a set of ovalized exhaust pipes (4-2-1) with an Akrapovič muffler, a “totally new aluminium diamond frame” that uses the rear of the engine as an upper shock mount, a longer swingarm, 43 mm Öhlins NPX fork, and something called “second generation Öhlins Object Based Tuning interface,” which is claimed to provide finer control of front and rear suspension settings.

Until just a couple of years ago, Honda eschewed a lot of the electronic rider aids other manufacturers were throwing at their sport bikes, claiming that its top flight CBR was so well-balanced it didn’t need the magic. But the present has a way of creeping up on the past, and these days Honda’s into it with the electronics. The RR-R has a six-axis Inertial Measurement Unit, a 3-level electronic steering damper, three default riding modes for power, engine braking, wheelie control and torque control, and an adjustable start mode. And we were hoping for a kick-starter.

There’s lots more: a 12.7-centimetre TFT display, a smart key system. Brembo four-piston radially mounted calipers are squeezed by a Brembo master cylinder and lever. Discs are 330 mm wide. Rear tire is 200 mm wide. Honda claims a “best-in-class” drag coefficient of 0.270, and there are winglet structures that “effectively generate the same downforce as the 2018 RC213V MotoGP machine.”

Honda Canada’s website says the bike is “coming soon,” so we suspect it’ll be here before the year 2021, and we also suspect it’ll be expensive, but Honda’s not saying at the moment. It’s not bad looking, though. 



PRESS LAUNCH

2020 HARLEY-DAVIDSON LIVEWIRE



THE SPEED OF ELECTRONS

H-D's electric motorcycle is pricey,
but smooth and quick

By Jean Paré in Portland, Oregon

It is now possible to use the words “Harley-Davidson,” “high-technology” and “electric power” in the same sentence. Since 2010, a team of engineers has been working on the LiveWire project with the objective of creating a fully electric motorcycle. So the most conservative of manufacturers wanted to jump into the Star Wars era ahead of all others! That was certainly a bold move for Harley-Davidson. It also shows that the American company clearly wants to attract new motorcyclists. Will the gamble pay off? The future will tell.

I was eager to see the final result of that project. The production model is available this fall in Canada. I had the chance to ride LiveWire prototypes in 2015 and I wanted to compare the new machine with the proto model. The things I remembered most were its exceptional design, power and silence, and its limited riding range.

THE CONCEPT

According to Harley-Davidson spec sheets, the LiveWire delivers a range of 225 km in the city, and 142 km in combined highway/city riding. For charging the battery, two options are available. Level 1 allows you to connect to any regular domestic electrical outlet using a regular cable (under the seat). The charging time is then more than 8 hours, the equivalent of an entire night. Level 2 is a fast charge (connector on the fake gas tank): it allows you to charge the battery to 80% in 40 minutes, and get a full charge in 60 minutes.

PRESS LAUNCH

2020 HARLEY-DAVIDSON LIVEWIRE



The engine produces a claimed 105 hp and 86 lb-ft of torque, which explains the claimed performance: 0 to 100 km/h in 3 seconds. A real rocket! That is impressive, especially considering that this bike is no lightweight (249 kg). The battery alone weighs 100 kg.

On the high-tech side of things, yes you read correctly, high technology on a Harley-Davidson, the LiveWire is also equipped with sophisticated rider aids: Electronic Chassis Control (ECC), cornering-enhanced Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Traction Control System (TCS) and Drag-Torque Slip Control System (DSCS).

The frame is made of aluminum. The Showa suspension is fully adjustable (manually) front and rear. Final drive is through a belt, and the transmission is one-speed. The Revelation engine offers seven driving modes: Sport, Road, Rain, Range, plus three modes that can be customized according to your riding preferences.

W800 STREET

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PRESS LAUNCH

2020 HARLEY-DAVIDSON LIVEWIRE



THE HD CONNECT APPLICATION

With the purchase of your LiveWire, you get free access to the Harley-Davidson application for one year. This app allows you to stay connected with your machine wherever you are. You can access important information such as the level of charge of the battery, the exact location of your motorcycle, and service data. Plus, you can receive a security warning if your bike is touched or moved. Of course, to use these functions, you need to have data access through your cell phone.

The H-D app also allows you to find the nearest charging station or Harley dealer with a charging station. And since your phone will already be connected with the LiveWire, you'll just have to follow directions on the machine's touch screen.

The 11 cm screen can be pivoted, a nice feature to divert the sun's reflection or simply to place it at the ideal angle for your height. There is a lot of information available, and it is presented in a very clear manner and the menu is easy to use.

LET'S GO!

The temperature is ideal and the forecast calls for a fine day in Portland, Oregon. The people at Harley chose this place for a reason: Oregon is known as a very green and ecological state. The bikes are nicely aligned in the hotel parking lot and I have no hesitation in picking my favourite: the orange one! Looking at these machines, you readily see their top-notch finish and equipment. Harley says the LiveWires are premium motorcycles and that is true: Brembo brakes, Showa suspension, Samsung batteries, full electronic features, high-end paint, etc.

Taking place on the bike, the riding position appears to be comfortable. It is somewhat sporty with wide and low bars and rearward pegs. In fact, it is pretty close to the riding position of a naked bike. The bar controls are easy to get used to since they are almost identical to the ones on other Harley-Davidsons. But this is pretty much the only connection you can make with a conventional Harley!

I turn the bike on and . . . nothing. That's a strange feeling for an old biker like me seeking the good old sensations of a V-twin. And, of course, it is out of the question to twist the throttle





Eight Harleys cruise through town
... silently—except for the babble of
journalism.

enthusiastically to hear the engine roar as I would normally do naturally. Because this bike jumps ahead at the slightest movement of your right wrist. You have to learn to use the throttle with care: the power curve is linear and the delivery is instantaneous, which is different from a gas engine that you have to rev after each gear shift. So I prudently ride into downtown Portland, but I get used to the beast real quick. Under my visor, you would have seen a large smile. I am enjoying myself as I did in 2015: for a few hours I feel like I am riding a jet fighter in a Star Wars movie. A great feeling! Except for that nice little sound, I am riding in total silence, and that's something you get to appreciate in no time. Despite its weight, the LiveWire is easy to ride in a city environment. Take-offs and stops are very smooth once you have learned to fine-control the throttle. This is a completely different motorcycling experience: I ride feeling and enjoying the city beat. What's more, I can talk to my fellow journalists at stoplights without having to shout. Eight Harleys cruising through town unnoticed, that's something new!

LET'S GET DOWN TO BUSINESS

OK, that was a nice little city ride to get used to the machines, but it's now time to see what the LiveWire really has to offer performance-wise!

YZF-R1

The 2020 Yamaha R1 is forged from the technology and development gained from countless racetrack challenges, from MotoGP to the Canadian Superbike Championship.



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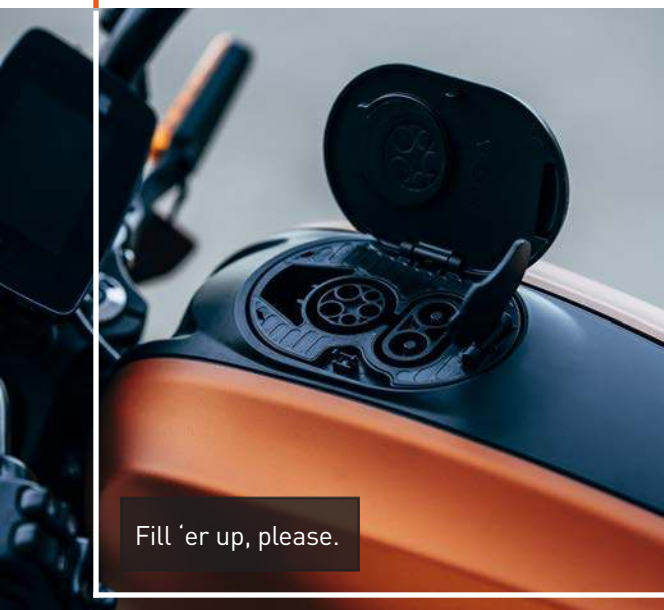
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PRESS LAUNCH

2020 HARLEY-DAVIDSON LIVEWIRE



And the answer is: absolutely wild! When we reach the first straight line, I twist the throttle fully and I start flying . . . literally. I have a quick glance at the screen and I see a number that's not fit to print. This is a rocket! Harley-Davidson says the LiveWire can accelerate from 0 to 100 km in 3.0 seconds, and I believe it! After the first straight comes the first curve. I hope the brakes are powerful. The front one is very efficient, and I am going to use it a lot through the day. As for the rear brake, it is OK, but I would have liked a little more bite.

The LiveWire reacts well entering that first curve but I feel the weight of the battery up front and I have to push a little harder on the bars to negotiate that turn neatly. It does not handle as naturally as a standard sport motorcycle. Also, when coming out of a curve, you may accelerate more forcefully than expected since you don't have to change gears. So on twisty roads you can end up entering the next curve a little too fast, hence the importance of having powerful brakes! Otherwise, this motorcycle behaves very well. The Sport mode is really up to the task. To really appreciate the chassis, you have to adjust the suspensions, though. As for the driving range offered by the battery, I can't really tell since I stayed in Sport mode all day and drove very aggressively: I was twisting the throttle on each and every possible opportunity!

Interesting detail for those of you in love with vibrations, the LiveWire produces a heartbeat-like sensation that you feel through the seat at stop signs!




SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	liquid-cooled permanent magnet electric motor
BATTERY	lithium-ion, 15.5 kWh
BACK-UP BATTERY	12 V 15 A to power lights, key, etc.
CLAIMED HORSEPOWER	105 hp
TRANSMISSION	one-speed
FRONT BRAKE	2 discs, 300 mm
REAR BRAKE	1 disc, 260 mm
FRONT TIRE	120/70/17
REAR TIRE	180/55/17
WEIGHT	249 kg
SEAT HEIGHT	787 mm
COLOURS	yellow, orange, black
WARRANTY	2 years parts and labour, 5 years on battery
PRICE	\$37,250



THE VERDICT

Yes I would like to have one in my garage, but I don't think that my bank manager would agree. This machine is much too expensive in my opinion. Harley-Davidson is targeting customers who appreciate technology, luxury-oriented brand names, style, quality and finish. The LiveWire offers all that, plus something more: a unique riding experience. How will the customers react? The future will tell. One thing is for sure, though, Harley Davidson is proposing a new approach to motorcycle riding. The LiveWire is stylish and powerful. It delivers breathtaking acceleration and a riding experience never offered before on a Harley-Davidson. The only things left to take care of are the driving range. And the price. 





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Always wear a helmet, eye protection and protective clothing, and please respect the environment when riding. Obey the law and read your owner's manual thoroughly. Honda recommends taking a motorcycle rider training course. Honda encourages you to operate your vehicle at all times in a safe and responsible manner and in accordance with the law.



CUTTING EDGES

Suzuki sword is sharp but civilized

By Steve Thornton

Photos: Steve Thornton and Suzuki

Spring in Japan is cherry blossom season. The pink flowering trees are everywhere, and in bloom they are a stunning sight and a major tourist attraction. We weren't in Japan to see flowers, though, and anyway we were a couple of weeks early for the big pink. We three Canadians—Suzuki PR rep Marcus Martellacci, journalist Bertrand Gahel, and me—were on the island of Honshu in March to ride the new Katana, a 1,000 cc naked bike that is meant to take advantage of several things: horsepower gains of the past few decades, a tendency for motorcyclists to thrive on nostalgia, and the mythic stance of a jewel-like curved sword that samurai warriors carried back when they had an authority of life or death over mortals.

And when, after a few days spent touring around Honshu and the cities of Hamamatsu and Kyoto, we were finally able to mount the atavistic Suzuki Katana, we weren't treated to a slamdance around public streets with a Suzuki guide heading the pack. We were given a forested mountain, a 10-kilometre closed-off section of highway, and about two dozen motorcycles with licence plates that said, only, "SUZUKI." Two dozen Katanas because there were about that many foreign journalists in attendance. We were flown first class, taken for tours of the Suzuki Historical Museum and a factory in Hamamatsu (where I saw a worker fitting the rear wheel and swingarm to a partly-assembled Hyabusa),





PRESS LAUNCH

2020 SUZUKI KATANA



Starting line for a 10-km ride up the mountain—and back, of course. No cars, no trucks, no buses, and no cops, but lots of curves. Let's all stay here forever.

the Nijō Castle in Kyoto, and a sword forge, where a master swordsmith who looked too young and comfortable to be making killer swords allowed us to lay hands on a katana—sword, that is—that he had hammered, forged, polished, and sharpened, taking a brick of steel from raw material to glistening, if potentially deadly, art. It was all lovely and even, at times, breathtaking, but we were there to ride, and so we did.

And when it was all done, I asked myself a question: Why did they bother?

Don't get me wrong. There's so little to be faulted in the new Katana motorcycle that you have to look for problems; they don't just appear for you. The engine, a liquid-cooled four of 999 cc displacement and a claimed 110 kW at 10,000 rpm and 108 Nm of torque at 9,500 (that's 147 hp and 80 ft-lb of torque) was lifted from the 2005–2008 GSX-R1000 and is a supplier of “tenacious torque at low revs,” as we were told. It's the engine that the GSX-S1000 uses, and it's exuberantly strong, linear in output, and smooth, with a nice snarl at the tail. The engine is housed in the light alloy frame of the GSX-S, and the swingarm



was lifted from the 2016 GSX-R1000—it's modern and efficient, in other words. Suspension is by fully adjustable 43 mm inverted Kayaba fork and single rear shock adjustable for spring preload and rebound damping. There's nothing to say about the bouncy parts except that they bounce properly. Front brakes are four-piston radially mounted calipers by Brembo with 310 mm discs; rear is a single-piston unit by Nissin and both are equipped with Bosch ABS. You want to stop, you stop. Wheels are light alloy with Dunlop Roadsport tires in standard sizes. It's got six gears, EFI with 44 mm throttle bodies and dual throttle valves, traction control with three modes as well as off, the first mode being closest to off while mode 3 would be used in rain and slippery conditions. Lighting is LED.

That's all good stuff, and in general could be said of any number of modern four-cylinder semi-sports with naked ambition and good self-control. It's not where the Katana resembles its 38-year-old predecessor that it shines; it's where the new Katana differs from the old Katana that it becomes a motorcycle that you could live with. First, of course, it's got a trunk full of horsepower. Not very long ago a motorcycle with nearly 150 hp at the crank dined with the gods. Think early Hayabusa and R1. Top flight sporting motorcycles today come closer to 200 than 150 hp, at least at high rpm levels, but 20 years ago 150 hp made journalists wet their tight little leather trousers. The original Katana, with a tube frame, air-cooled 1100 cc engine, and about 100 hp, made waves in the early '80s, but performance is always relative. Today's version is 50 percent more powerful. It's also much more comfortable. Today's Katana has lower footpegs, a shorter fuel tank (and shorter reach to the handlebar, which itself is higher), and a tapered seat that's 825 mm from the ground, making getting your boot soles onto the pavement easier. Those elements make the 2019 Katana a much nicer motorcycle to sit on than the original model.



Japanese gardens at a shrine. At right, the Suzuki plant in Hamamatsu; a worker assembling a new motorcycle; Martellacci in black shirt and cap with a U.S. journalist.

The new model also has better suspension (the original had a 35 mm fork with antitive, which is like attaching a fork to a pair of rubber chopsticks) and much better brakes than the original; it also has TC and ABS electronic rider-safety aids, and electronic fuel injection. (I asked at the press conference why there were no other electronic aids, such as engine power modes or tilt-a-whirl ABS, and was told the Katana is not that kind of motorcycle.) In keeping with that long reach to the handlebar, the original Katana was long, with a 1,520 mm wheelbase, a rake of 29°50', and 118 mm of trail. The new model has a wheelbase of 1,460 mm, a 25° rake and just 100 mm of trail. At 215 kg wet, it's also reported to be 30 kg lighter than the curbside 1981 Katana. None of that is markedly superior to what other motorcycles of its ilk can offer the rider, or a reason to buy a new Katana. But all of it contributes to what might become a very good motorcycle on your garage floor, if you buy into the mystique.



PRESS LAUNCH

2020 SUZUKI KATANA



Thornton finds that iconic looks matter only when you're off the bike; when you're on it, power, handling, and comfort are more important, and the Katana has all three. At right, though, it does have looks. Note the taillight and licence plate holder, mounted to the swingarm.

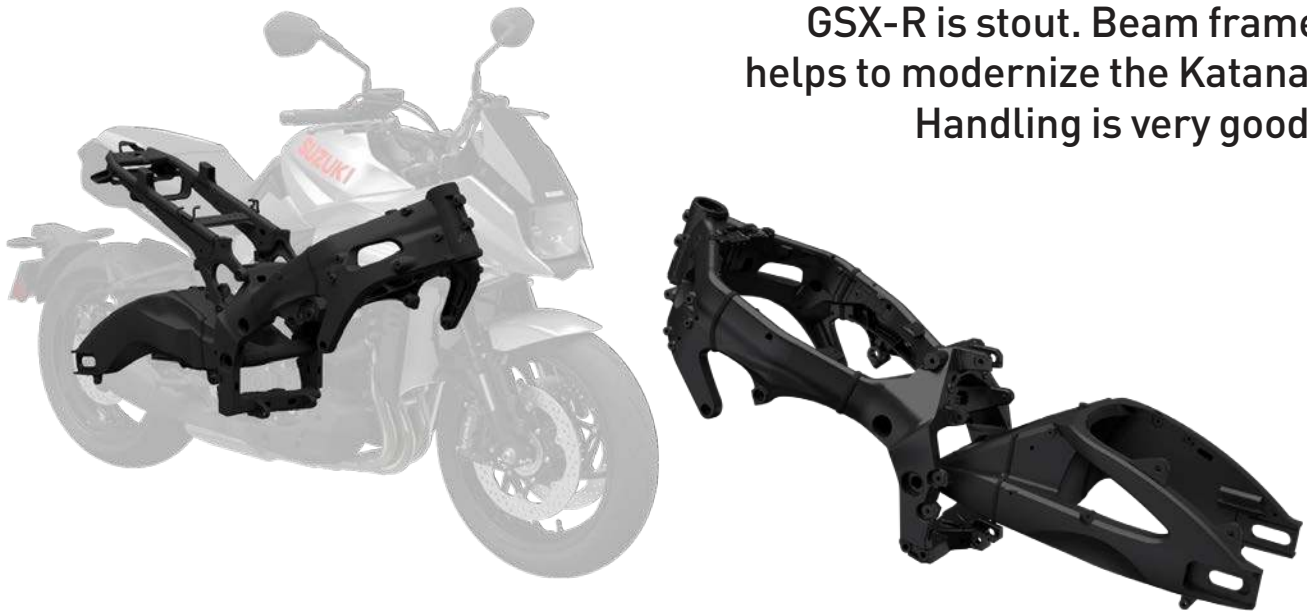


And here's what I thought after several rides up and down the Arashiyama-Takao Parkway just outside of Kyoto (you can see it on Google Maps, though I couldn't tell you precisely which curves we experienced—let's just say the best ones). The following is quoted from a little blue NockCo notebook.

—It's a quite fast group and a very twisty road. There's a bit of snatch rolling on in second gear from off-throttle, and it stands up a little on braking in a turn. The seat feels good, flat and firm, and it doesn't push my groin into the tank. There's a great throaty sound and good linear power. It's quick steering without much effort, but seems to need continued pressure on the bar in turns. Pegs and bar feel right. Don't notice the bend in my knees (always good). Seat height is a little tall for me, (but I'm a little short for it).—

That's it for my road notes. But standing off to the side while people fiddled with their phones and tried to steal ideas from other journalists, I noticed that the word SUZUKI on the fuel tank is angled in line with the nose plastic, making it look in one way similar to the original. Of course, designers went to some consider efforts to make the new Katana resemble, superficially, the old, and it's where that family resemblance can be seen that the new bike will seem unique in a playground full of approximately identical tough guys like the Kawasaki Z1000R, the Yamaha MT-10, and Honda's CBR1000R.

Swingarm from a late-model
GSX-R is stout. Beam frame
helps to modernize the Katana.
Handling is very good.



The design of the new Katana has been called a “throwback to the original,” and that’s evident in the shape of the tank, which chief motorcycle engineer Satoru Terada says “seems to be cut with a sword.” The new model was born out of a vision from Italian designer Rodolfo Frascoli, who presented a concept bike at the Intermot Motorcycle Show in Milan in November 2017. Suzuki designers took that concept and modified parts of it—the fuel tank and the headlight, for example, look more like the original Katana than Frascoli’s design had them, and the handlebar was raised and moved back to slide the centre of balance farther back than the Frascoli concept had it. The result is a motorcycle that, in the angularity of the tank and its integration with the side fairings, strongly resembles the original Katana, which was created and even named by the German designer Hans Muth and was first ridden on public roads in 1981. Muth said that when he presented his design to Suzuki personnel, company president (at the time) Osamu Suzuki said he was reminded of the supersonic Concorde, and later asked Muth why he chose the name “Katana.”

Muth told him that he’d been thinking about samurai and their sword, the katana, which became a symbol for him in his development of the motorcycle’s forms.

That Katana, which appeared in an era of UJMs (let me Google that for you—oh, never mind; do it yourself) that could hardly be told apart even with tank badges spelling out Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, and Yamaha, was a startlingly different motorcycle. Most of them didn't have plastic, and the Katana's was as daring a design as the miniskirt was in the 1960s. Honda's vaunted 750 Interceptor appeared around that time (a couple of years later, but of the same generation) and was, technically, a superior motorcycle, except for a problem with melting cams. Its fairing, V-4 engine, and power and handling characteristics were advanced beyond the dreams of other motorcycle makers. But it was lame, in a visual sense, compared to the Katana. It was still enough to make you look twice, of course, at the time, but in motorcycle porn terms, the Honda 750 Interceptor was Playboy. The Katana was Hustler. You could smell the difference before you even got inside the motorcycle store.

At the final dinner in Kyoto, the head of marketing for the motorcycle group told us that about 5,000 Katanas would likely be built in the first year and would be aimed at Canada, the U.S., Europe, Japan, and Oceania. It turns out that, according to Marcus Martellacci, the first of them will be seen in Canadian showrooms around the end of November, as 2020 models.




PRESS LAUNCH

2020 SUZUKI KATANA



In a few weeks those branches would be ablaze with colour, but for now, the Katana is the centre of attraction.

How well they sell here could have nothing to do with nostalgia for their predecessor and those hot times in the early '80s and everything to do with price, the buying public's fancy, and insurance rates. The 2020 Katana 1000 certainly offers performance and comfort to match other sporty standards, but it does not punch above its weight limit. It looks good whether you judge it as a descendant or an original on its own, and the 2020 Katana does punch at its weight limit—so it's got an even chance of winning the sales wars. And if buyers attracted by its performance, handling, comfort, and looks are also afflicted with nostalgia for the good old days of motorcycles, it just might prove to be the edge that Suzuki sales people want it to be and that its namesake certainly was. The 2020 Suzuki Katana will retail in Canada for \$14,699. 



It looks mean and aggressive, but beneath the Honda CB500F's streetfighter styling you'll find a bike that's eager to please and easy to like. And with more power, a new slipper clutch, improved ABS braking and a whole bunch of other upgrades for 2019, the CB500F can't wait to show you how much fun motorcycling can be.

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PRESS LAUNCH

TRIUMPH 2020 STREET TRIPLE



A gem of a middleweight

It's naked, fast, and comfortable

By Paul Penzo

Here I am, following an Italian journalist clearly accustomed to being on the gas through twisty European mountain roads as he crosses over the line into opposing traffic lanes with confidence. Rock faces on one side, deep drops on the other, cars sparsely placed throughout and, when there is a moment to spare, some beautiful scenery. As any truly eternal child might, I give 'er as current safety constraints are reset, the engine roars more readily between blips higher in the rpm range, and a simultaneous sense of ease and deep inner grins set in.

We are near the port town of Cartagena in Spain on the morning of a warm yet cloudy fall day, mostly inland with the occasional coastal palm tree view, riding Triumph's 2020 updated Street Triple. A fully decked out naked bike with trick street-based Öhlins shock in the rear and both Showa forks and Brembo brakes up front—components often found on full-sized sport bikes with higher price tags. Real eye-candy, with high attention to detail everywhere I look.

The TFT display provides intuitive electronic adjustments for power delivery, ABS, and traction control, all of which are now set to street mode. I find it a bit stiff at a slower pace through small villages, and so would soften the physical

PRESS LAUNCH

TRIUMPH 2020 STREET TRIPLE



suspension adjustment ranges if a daily ride. Vibration through the bars is notable, but compartment syndrome in both my forearms is likely to blame. The updated mirrors provide an excellent view of things behind, and the wide stance between grips provides good leverage for tossing the bike from side-to-side with relative ease.

Seating position is comfortable until about 135 km/h, with my head and upper body fully exposed to the elements with maybe just a peripheral view of the front wheel. My perforated Altimate riding jacket provides a welcome breeze—any faster, and I am in fighter mode with arms out and rigid as wind pressure steadily increases with higher speed and unique mid-tone engine growl. Downshift with varying intensity while noting crisp, smooth, unassisted throttle blips, and eventually engage the clutch to stop. Lever action is so light I still frequently slip the clutch too much when starting off.



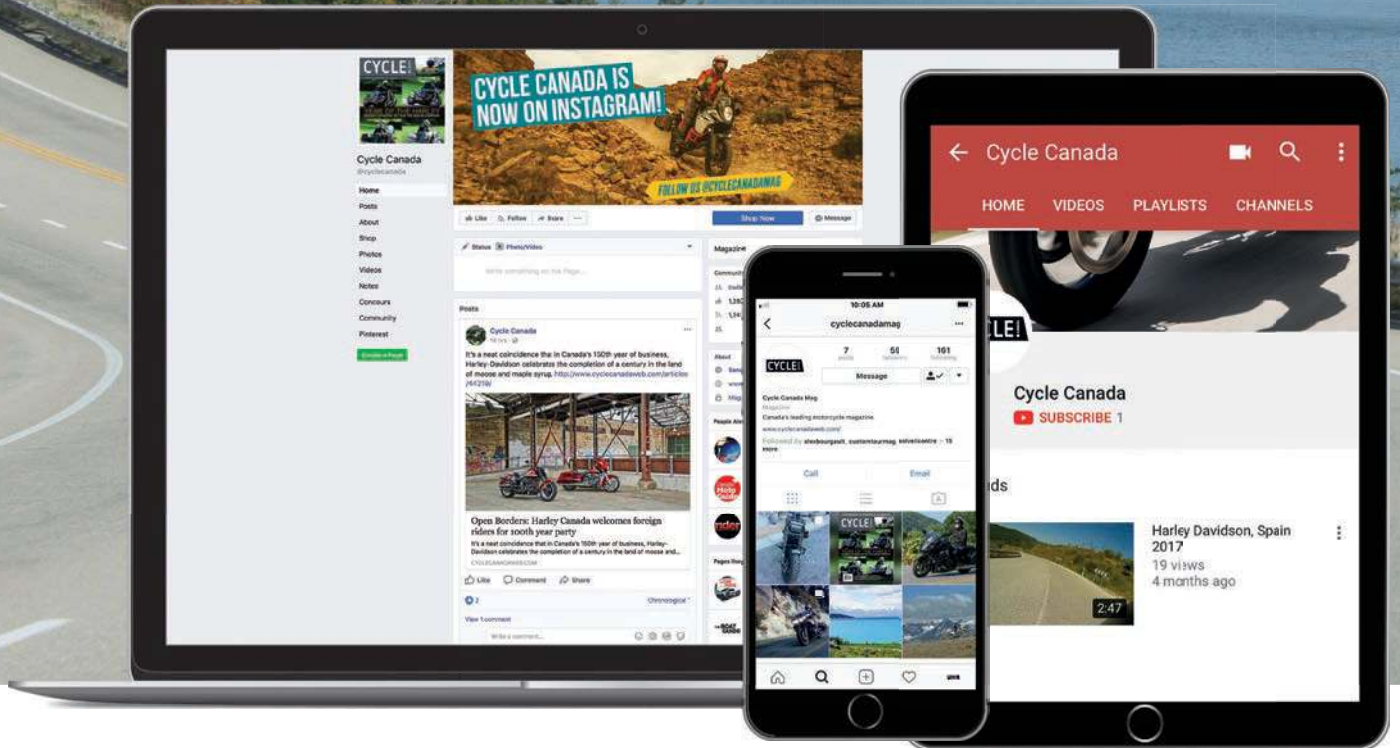
We arrive at Circuito Cartegana for lunch and what turns out to be most of the day, but end up with just three 15-minute sessions to learn the track and wring the little bike's neck. I have always been one to start slow to go fast—it hurts less and generally delivers better results, but this track's flow feels off to me. Only by the third and final session do I start finding the groove and pull away. That is until the final few laps when I find a false neutral and/or it pops out of second gear under load for the third time. It did it first while on the street and I had thought nothing of it then, but it threw me off my game now.

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TRIUMPH 2020 STREET TRIPLE



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PRESS LAUNCH

TRIUMPH 2020 STREET TRIPLE



EMISSIONS CUT, POWER UP

Triumph commenced supplying 765 cc triple cylinder engines to all brands competing in MotoGP's spec series Moto2 class in 2019. Being amongst the world's highest levels of road racing, this 2020 model clearly benefits from the R&D. With more than 70,000 Street Triple units sold worldwide, it is a uniquely important member of the family.

In spite of having greater restrictions to meet more restrictive EURO 5 emissions standards, this upgraded engine now delivers nine percent more power in both the mid-range torque and horsepower curves, primarily between 7,000 and 10,000 rpm—with more torque practically everywhere. Also, reciprocating mass has been decreased by seven percent to deliver quicker throttle response and easier left-right-left transitions.

Engine modifications include a revised intake track and exhaust cams, plus machining upgrades to the crankshaft, balancer and clutch. The gearbox has also been upgraded with a power-shifter that now comes stock and is actuated based on drum rather than gear lever position for allegedly more precise and seamless lever-actuation—the automated throttle blips are practically perfect harmony regardless of whether going up or down in the gearbox.

Exhaust fumes escape through a higher flowing and now carbon tipped exhaust cannister thanks to a double catalyst system. Take a look underneath towards the back on any full lean left side shot to see how well-hidden it is (not the cannister side). And to help slow things down rather than speed them up, Brembo's MCS ratio and span adjustable master cylinder is mounted up front, so I can now modulate how progressively braking force is applied through the lever, as well as how far it is from the bar.

The TFT dashboard angle can now be adjusted, and has upgrades to both the graphics and rider modes to complement the engine upgrades, all of which can be accessed through revised controls while riding. Pretty easy to use even for those of us who need glasses, although a more prominent tach view would have helped. But due to new regulations, ABS can apparently no longer be turned off. A free new "MyTriumph" app can also be utilized provided you purchase the Bluetooth module to connect with smartphones for access to music and map directions, plus a GoPro while riding.

Every piece of the bodywork is revised yet remains in tune with family values, with its most distinctive new feature being the brighter, accentuated twin LED headlights which look to me like angry robot eyebrows more than anything else. Love them or hate them, your call. Passenger seat height has been raised for comfort, and comes with a solo-seat cover for the sportier look mostly displayed here.

Fit and finish is very good and has more focus placed on making it monochrome with titanium colour to better match its bigger more throaty sibling, the Speed Triple. And the range of accessories available to personalize the bike is extensive. Seems too good to be true, but its list price of \$14,050 remains unchanged, in spite of all the investment to improve performance and style.

Do you think Triumph wants to increase its market share?

PRESS LAUNCH

TRIUMPH 2020 STREET TRIPLE





FAMILY VALUES

The group stops at a nice bar overlooking the waterfront for a break during the morning street ride, where senior head office Triumph marketing and R&D team members engage with the invited media. Triumph is part of a family business in the UK with no external investors; the family also owns a similarly sized national home building business. The owner is still actively involved, and has one son acting as CEO of Triumph and his other son as CEO of the other. A board of directors oversees Triumph, and I am told the culture remains that of a family business, in spite of having over 2,000 employees worldwide.

R&D is all done in the UK. Once ready for production, a global supply chain combined with manufacturing plants located worldwide is leveraged, with only minor things like machining the crank left back home. All plants are built to UK specs, and local post-secondary institutions are solicited for bright new recruits. Apparently, one would not be able to tell the difference between plants if given tours, as the attention to detail and processes are consistent between them. This might be more of an asset for Triumph than most, given Brexit and its impact on businesses across England.


With a deeply rooted history as an industry icon that fell to become a national embarrassment, Triumph has regained a form of national pride as a result of growing global success and increased market share in a shrinking industry. The first decade under the current regime was spent addressing quality issues, and all profits are still re-invested. Only recently has focus been increased on marketing and sales initiatives to better tell its story and engage with customers, all while the business's value increases substantially, and we keep getting cooler bikes.

PRESS LAUNCH

TRIUMPH 2020 STREET TRIPLE



Whatever. It may have been just me spoiled with the power shifter and not applying enough gear lever pressure. I do know that the Street Triple felt like a true middleweight supersport minus a windscreen. The Pirelli dual compound rear and single compound front Diablo Supercorsa SP3 V3 tires provided excellent grip and feedback regardless of environment. So much so that the Dianese leathers borrowed from Rider's Choice remain unscathed, but now need replacement knee sliders.

What the Street Triple may lose in a marginally longer wheelbase to a full-on sport bike it gains in a wider-stance and higher handlebar, much like supersport entries of not very long ago. And it all comes within a very modern and comparatively comfortable package. I can see Triumph's Street Fighter as my daily commuter with occasional weekend track day duties. The number of open sportbikes to be had for a snack would surely bring smiles, all on a bike I can take my wife and kids out on as well. A true gem. 



FIRST PERSON

GREGORY KATCHIN, CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO

In October 1965 I bought a used Honda S-90 in La Salle, Quebec, for \$300 (new ones were \$465). A month later I got my license, and that night we had a snowfall; I parked the bike for the winter.

Nineteen sixty-six was an interesting summer for me, after one year of university—my first summer with “wheels,” and with a girlfriend, Lorraine.

In the evenings several of us would meet at the “Bo-Peep,” a BP gas station in Dorval. We all had small motorbikes. Wayne had a Honda CA-95 (150), Ken had a Suzuki 120, and Gary from Nova Scotia had a Honda CB-160. A normal evening ride for us was a circular route around the West Island of Montreal, going west all the way to Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue. Then we’d ride north into Senneville and then east to Pierrefonds and then south back to the Bo-Peep gas station.

The evening of July 23rd, 1966, started out normally. Lorraine and I and Wayne (and his friend Terry as passenger) and Ken and Gary started out on four bikes from Bo-Peep, heading west along Lakeshore Drive to Ste. Anne de Bellevue. In Senneville we approached a hill with a blind crest. I was in the lead, and my Honda 90 with Lorraine as passenger struggled to do 30 mph up the hill. Wayne on his 150 grew tired of following me and he pulled out into the oncoming lane and passed me on the hill in the left lane, and Ken and Gary followed. Unfortunately, the Senneville police car approached us westbound, coming over the top of the hill. There was Wayne and his 150 in their lane, coming towards them. The police car took evasive action and hit the shoulder. Wayne, with passenger Terry, kept going and headed down the road, along with Gary and Ken on their bikes, leaving me behind.

Since I had not done anything wrong, Lorraine and I continued to ride eastbound along Gouin Blvd at the 30 mph speed limit. After a few minutes, I saw headlights in my rear view mirror, and the shape of a police car became evident. He followed me for a few minutes, then turned on the flashers and pulled me over. The policeman and his partner asked where the other three motorcyclists were. I could honestly tell them I had no idea.

Lorraine and I rode away eastwards for about five minutes. But Lorraine, who (it turned out) had a crush on Wayne, kept nattering to me that we should wait for Wayne to catch up.



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I finally gave in, we parked on the side of the road for 30 minutes or so, and waited for the other guys to catch up to us.

The evening grew dark, Lorraine finally agreed that the other guys were not coming our way, and we continued on our ride to get back to the BP gas station, to meet the guys.


I was still wearing sunglasses from earlier, and as we rode along, Lorraine nattered again in my ear, something about Wayne. I looked back to reply, but just then we rounded a left-hand curve in the road, which I had not seen with my sunglasses on. I yelled "Hold on!" and hit the brakes. We skidded on the gravel shoulder, then went down, and sliding on the right side of the Honda 90 we hit the ditch. When we got up, my right ankle hurt and I could hardly walk, and I checked Lorraine who was fine except for blood running down her face from a small cut on her right forehead. I moved Lorraine away from the roadway and I limped to a house that had lights on. I found an older couple there, told them what had happened, and they called for help.

A little while later a Pierrefonds police car arrived, and the police took us on a "fast and furious" drive south on St. John's Road, with lights and siren turned on, to the Lakeshore General Hospital in Pointe-Claire. The doctors took care of Lorraine first, because of the blood on her face. I phoned Lorraine's parents to tell them where we were. I sat in the Emergency department for quite a while, and then I heard the sound of motorcycle engines. Our riding companions had arrived.

Apparently after the guys had passed me on the hill and almost hit the westbound police car, they all turned onto a side road, waited there behind some trees until the police car came back eastbound, and then retraced their route back to Dorval and the BP Gas station, to wait for us. When we did not make it back, they phoned Lorraine's parents who told them where we were.

Lorraine's parents came to the hospital to pick us up and take us both home, and the next day my father, a non-rider, rode the Honda 90 back home.

Lorraine was fine; she had worn a helmet and she had only a tiny cut on her forehead. A week later I returned to my summer job. Lorraine and I broke up the following week.

I bought a new '66 Honda Super Hawk one month later. And I've had no accidents in the 51 years since that night. 

First Person is dedicated to readers of Cycle Canada. Tell us about a motorcycle trip, tale, or experience that you won't soon forget. Contributors will be granted a free 3-year subscription to the magazine. Send 1,000 words and a photograph to cyclecanada@editionsjeanrobert.com.

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